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THE "DAWN" IN HEBREW.

WE are accustomed to think and speak of the Dawn, as the Oxford Dictionary defines it, as "the first appearance of light in the sky before sunrise, or the time when it appears, the beginning of daylight, daybreak." It is, however, to be remembered that there is a morning-dusk, the *Morgendämmerung* or *Morgengrauen*, as well as a morning-glow, the *Morgenröthe*; in other words a twilight, in which the dividing line may be difficult to draw; and that it is as possible to speak of the end of the night as of the beginning of the day. The question is: From which side did the Hebrew writers regard the dawn? For it should not be forgotten that there are other things besides their mode of writing from right to left in which these writers take a different point of view from that which we assume as a matter of course.

First of all, the name given to the dawn, *shaḥar*, is from a stem meaning to be black. The simple verb occurs in Job xxx. 30: "My skin is black (and falleth) from me." And there are several derivatives with the same signification. The derived form (*Pi'el*) in the sense of "seeking early" is rightly regarded as a denominative, and has no apparent implication of either light or darkness.

Then, the mode of speaking of the dawn is to be noted. Whereas there are fixed terms for the sun's rising, as there are for its setting, the verb used with the dawn is never one of these. So also, the "morning" and the "light" have their appropriate locutions, but these are different from the expression applied to the dawn. The sun "rises" or "appears" (*zāraḥ*), or "comes forth" (*yātsā*), so light "arises," or "comes forth," or "is parted," or "breaks forth," or "shines"; but the dawn invariably "goes up" or ascends (*'ālā*). And this usage is more frequent than our Versions would lead the English reader to suppose. Thus we read:

"when the morning arose" (Gen. xix. 15); "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day," and "let me go, for the day breaketh" (Gen. xxxii. 25, 26); "about the spring of the day" (1 Sam. ix. 26); "when the morning rose next day" (Jon. iv. 7); "from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared" (Neh. iv. 21, *Heb.* iv. 15). In all these cases *shaḥar* is conjoined with the verb *'ālā*, and in no case does *shaḥar* appear with any other verb. The stereotyped phrase to denote the time of dawning is *'ălôth hash-shaḥar*; so that the *shaḥar* by itself does not express time, as, e.g., the "morning" (*bōqer*) does. There are two apparent exceptions to the usage referred to, but they only confirm the usage: "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning" (Isa. lviii. 8); and "His going forth is sure as the morning" (Hos. vi. 3). In both cases the *kaph* has its frequent force as a pregnant particle of general comparison, as in Ps. lxxxiii. 10, which is literally "Do to them as Midian, as Sisera, as Jabin at the brook Kishon"; and it is to be observed that in the passage in Isaiah it is the "light" that breaks forth or is "parted," according to the phrase used elsewhere, and in the passage in Hosea it is God's "going forth" which is expressed by a term applied to the Sun. And to show how even an expert in the language would be liable to depart from the usage, unless it had been well fixed, it may be mentioned that Salkinson, who in his Hebrew New Testament is generally so happy in his representations of the Hebrew idiom, uses the expression *ka'ălôth hab-bōqer* for "it was early" in John xviii. 28, although there is no occurrence of the expression in the Old Testament.

It may therefore be stated as the regular usage to denote the dawning that *'ālā* is the verb used with *shaḥar*; and the various combinations into which this *'ālā* enters may give us some idea of the conception underlying the *shaḥar*. Now,

in addition to its usual sense of local movement of bodies, the verb is applied, e.g., to the going up of mist (Gen. ii. 6), of dew (Exod. xvi. 14), of smoke (Gen. xix. 28), of a cloud (1 Kings xviii. 44), of fire (Jud. vi. 21), and so forth. The idea one would get from these combinations is that of some entity, more or less palpable, rising up from the surface of the earth, not darting out or breaking out as the light does, but being lifted up when the light is "parted" and the morning appears. It is, indeed, conceivable that the *shaḥar* might have been thought of as light coming up over the verge of the horizon; but these usages suggest something different, and the verb *'ālā* is never applied to the Sun itself, which "comes up" so conspicuously in that sense. So that, if we consider the *shaḥar* as something dim or dark, it would be a covering spread over the earth which is lifted to make way for the light.

There is a remarkable passage in Job xxxviii. 12–15 which may help us here:—

> Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days began,
> And caused the dayspring to know its place;
> That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
> And the wicked be shaken out of it?

Cheyne (*Job and Solomon*, p. 77) takes this as an instance of a primitive myth having died down into a metaphor, of which we have an even more striking indication in the "eyelids of the dawn" (Job iii. 9, xli. 10, *Heb.* xli. 18). "The personified Dawn," he says, "seizes the coverlet under which the earth has slept at its four ends, and shakes the evil-doers out of it like flies." Passing by the euphemism of the last word, I should say this is a better explanation than that of Driver (*The Book of Job in the Revised Version*): "The earth is pictured as a vast coverlet, and the dawn, which darts in a moment from east to west (Ps. cxxxix. 9) seizes this by its extremities, brings to light the wicked upon

it and shakes them off it like dust." It is somewhat difficult to follow the action here. Surely the extremities are the skirts or edges of the garment or coverlet spread over the earth, and not the earth itself. The question is, who takes hold of this covering, and what is it? The commentators say that the dawn seizes the covering, and our Versions imply as much by rendering the very indeterminate Infinitive *le'ĕḥoz* "so that it may take hold of." There are numerous cases of such a use of the Infinitive without an expressed subject. Thus: "Since man was placed (*minnî sîm*) upon earth" (Job xx. 4); "When the assembly is to be gathered (*behaqhîl* Num. x. 7). Or, if we must have a definite subject, why should not Job himself be understood? The connexion would then be: "Hast thou . . . . So as to take hold of." Let us consider the situation. In the context, Job is confronted with the wonderful phenomena of nature and challenged to do the like. He is asked if he has ever tried to perform the miracle of daybreak; the scene is set, and he is told what is to be done. Morning (*bōqer*) is to be commanded to stand ready; Dawn (*shaḥar*) is to be told where to take its place; and all is then ready for the covering of the earth to be seized, lifted up and shaken that the surface of the earth may "stand forth." And the verse cited by Driver from Ps. cxxxix. 9 would be admirably in keeping with this view: "Should I take up (*'essā*) the skirts of the dawn, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea,"—the remotest spot from the rising sun.

Here it is proper to draw attention to the features of an Eastern dawn, which are very different from what we are accustomed to in our humid and cloudy atmosphere. Travellers notice at once the shortness or entire absence of evening twilight, and have to be warned against exposing themselves to the sudden fall in temperature and deposit of dew. The morning twilight has the same sudden evanescence. Van de

Velde [1] was impressed by the fact that at Shechem, owing to the greater moisture and abundant vegetation, there was more colour to be observed in the morning and evening sky than elsewhere in Palestine, where in general, he says, "there is an absence of colouring, and of that charming dusky haze in which objects assume such softly blended forms, and in which also the transition in colour from the foreground to the farthest distance loses the hardness of outline peculiar to the perfect transparency of an Eastern sky." This last feature of hardness of outline is precisely what is meant in the passage under consideration. When day appears, the earth "is changed as clay under the seal, and all things stand forth as a garment."

And here is a description of the dawn in the North African desert, as seen by a brilliant French writer [2]:—

"In this country, morning and evening twilight (*crépuscule*) does not exist. Scarcely ever does one see those beautiful clouds, trailing, empurpled, detached, variegated, and fantastic, which colour our northern horizon at the moment when the sun rises, as well as at the hour of its setting. Here it is first a very vague brightness, which augments, extends, and fills the whole space in a few moments. Then suddenly, at the crest of a mountain, or it may be at the foot of an infinite plain, the sun appears such as when he mounts into the heavens, and without bearing that ruddy aspect, as if half-asleep, which he shows at his rising in our hazy latitudes."

On many a summer morning I observed the same thing during my residence in Syria. One would start before sunrise from a village in the Lebanon in order to reach the plain of Beyrout before the heat of the day. It was practically dark at starting,—as dark at least as a cloudless and

[1] *Syria and Palestine*, 1854, vol. i. p. 388.
[2] Guy de Maupassant, *Au Soleil*, p. 107 f.

star-lit sky made darkness possible; but before one had gone an hour it was full day. Little warning was given; the covering of the earth was lifted, or, shall we say, the *portière* of the bridegroom's chamber was raised, and the sun came forth "rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." Darkness flew away and it was high day.

It would seem then, if there is anything in the foregoing observations, as if the Hebrews were particularly impressed with the darker side of the dawn, and coined an expression which, whether based on myth or metaphor, has become well fixed in the language, and denotes the rising or lifting up of a covering in order that the light of day may come forth. It remains now to inquire whether, in the literature of the Old Testament, there are evidences of this dark connotation adhering to the word. And there are two passages which, I think, would gain in lucidity if this view were accepted.

Joel, in depicting the approach of the locust (Joel ii. 2) says:—

> A day of darkness and of gloominess,
> A day of clouds and thick darkness,
> As the dawn spread upon the mountains.

Here, if we take "dawn" as the morning dimness, we have a perfect parallelism; otherwise there is a sharp contradiction. Professor Driver, in his commentary on the passage,[1] in order to remove this contradiction, says that the words in the last line should go with what follows: "as the dawn spread upon the mountains, a people great and strong!" But, to say nothing of the inappropriateness of this comparison, the succeeding context is self-contained, and has no reference either to light or darkness:

> A great people and a strong,
> There hath not been ever the like,
> Neither shall be any more after them,
> Even to the years of many generations.

[1] *The Book of Joel*, in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.

Taking the usual view of the dawn, Professor Driver repeats the oft-quoted passage from Credner :—"The day before the locusts arrived, we were certain that they were approaching, from a yellow reflexion produced by their yellow wings in the heavens. As soon as this was observed, no one doubted that a vast swarm of locusts was at hand." I have no doubt that, on the occasion referred to, as is generally the case when the locust is "coming," there was that marked yellow haze, the accompaniment of a Sirocco wind, the appearance of which, especially after a prolonged drought, leads people in the East to say, "The locust is coming," very much as we say, in a very different condition of our atmosphere, "We shall have snow." But that the reflexion of the wings of the locust was seen a whole day before the locust appeared, *Credat Credner*! For, when the locust actually comes within the horizon, it is not a day of even reflected light, but a day of darkness and gloominess. And the descriptive word "spread" (*pārûsh*) should not be overlooked, a word never used of light, but applied, e.g., to wings, to a garment, to a net or snare, and so forth, and giving the common word in Arabic for a carpet or mattress, or what in recent time has come to be called in this country a "bed-spread."

I remember vividly my first acquaintance with the locust at Beyrout in 1865, a visitation to which one of the extracts in Dr. Driver's interesting Excursus refers. Every touch in the picture of Joel was seen to be true to the life; and not the least impressive detail was the sudden darkening of the sky at mid-day.[1] And I see that Meyrick, in the *Speaker's Commentary* on Joel takes the view here advocated, rendering: "like the glimmering twilight of the morning."

Another passage in which *shaḥar* has a significant place

[1] I may be permitted to refer to a "Wayside Sermon" on "The years that the locust hath eaten" in the *Sunday Magazine*, Dec., 1881.

is very unintelligible in our Versions. The A. V. of Isa. viii. 20 reads:—"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"; while the R.V. renders the last clause: "surely there is no morning for them." Kittel, in his *Biblia Hebraica* says that some words have dropped out; and Professor Skinner (*Camb. Bib. in loco*) ends his note on the passage by saying: "The original is so obscure that no great confidence can be placed in any translation." Let us see whether *light* on the passage does not come out of the *darkness* of the one significant word.

The context represents the "infatuated, God-forsaken people" asking the "believers in Divine revelation" (these are Skinner's phrases) "to seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter"; and the prophet says: "Should not a people seek unto their God?" And then, just as Jeremiah puts into the mouth of his contemporaries a form of words with which to confute the idolaters of their time (Jer. x. 11,) Isaiah here gives a formula or guiding maxim for the emergency: "To the Law and to the Testimony!" The immediately following two words *'im lō'*, improperly rendered in A.V. *if . . . not*, since there is no apodosis, should be rendered as in R.V. *surely*. So David Kimchi has it in his Commentary here, citing as a parallel example, "Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul" (Ps. cxxxi. 2), and there are many others, e.g. 1 Kings xx. 23; Isa. v. 29; Jer. xv. 11. And then, if "this word" is the motto or rule which the prophet has just given, the remaining clause *ăsher ên-lô shahar* may be translated quite literally: "which has no dimness." There is no need to supply a single word, and, what is more to the point, the contrast with the preceding context is complete and forcible: the "seeking to" unmeaning, mysterious black arts on the one hand, and, on the other, the appeal to the Law which

is Light. "Surely they should speak in this wise" instead of calling you to go after lying vanities.

We get no help from the LXX in this passage, which has "concerning which there is no giving of gifts," apparently reading *shoḥad* a "present" or "bribe." Reference must, however, be made to the rendering proposed by Professor Margoliouth [1]:

"Assuredly they shall say unto you thus: there is no witchcraft for it." This seems partly to follow the commentators in the Rabbinical Bible; but the connexion is not clear. The rendering is based on the Arabic equivalent of *shaḥar*, which has the sense of charming or bewitching; and it has been adopted by many expositors, and appears in the R.V. margin, in the passage Isa. xlvii. 11: "Evil shall come upon thee, thou shalt not know how to charm it away." There seem to be no other examples of this sense adhering to the Hebrew word [2]; and it is pertinent to remark that, even in the Arabic, the idea of witchery does not seem to be primary. There is a *saḥara*, for which the Dictionary quotes the Hamasa for authority, meaning to overlay or cover silver with gold; and the noun *saḥar* is defined as *tempus paulo ante auroram*. Fleischer maintains that the primary meaning of the Arabic root, according to the *Ḳāmus*, is that of "whitish black." If so, it seems very probable that the Arabic *sāḥir* or *saḥḥār* was so named from his working underhand, in fact, using the black art. And it is a very curious and interesting fact that the word nigromancy or negromancy is older in our language than necromancy although it seems to have been coined with a reference to the Greek and Latin forms.

We come back to the point from which we started. The

[1] *Lines of Defence of the Biblical Revelation*, p. 128; appeared in EXPOSITOR, Sixth Series, i., p. 339.

[2] If we took the word in the sense of "the end of the night" we might have a passable rendering—an interminable and unmitigated evil.

border line in the relations of space, and still more in those of time, is so shadowy that the indicating of these relations becomes a subjective matter, depending upon the point of view of the speaker. The present is but momentary, and we can express it, as the Hebrews also do, by a verb either in the perfect or in the imperfect. A striking example of the varying point of view is seen in the use of the two terms *l*ᵉ*phānîm* and *āḥôr* in Hebrew. The former of these words means "to the front" and points forward, while the latter means "behind" and points backward. So Jeremiah says that, from the days of Egypt, the people "went backward (*l*ᵉ'*āḥôr*) and not forward (*l*ᵉ*phānîm*)" (Jer. vii. 24). And (2 Sam. x. 9) "Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind" (*mippānîm ūmē'āḥôr*). Yet we find *l*ᵉ*phānîm* in the sense of "formerly" (Deut. ii. 12, 20; Josh. xi. 10, etc.), and *mill*ᵉ*phānîm* "from beforetime" (Isa. xli. 26); while *aḥărîth*, lit. "afterpart," comes to mean the end of time, the most distant future; the speaker transferring himself, in the one case, back to the front of the past, and, in the other, forward to the end of the future.

It is this which causes what rhetoricians call *antiphrasis*, according to which a word assumes in related branches of a Language-group, or even within the compass of one of the group, meanings which are opposite or contradictory. Within the circle of the Semitic languages there are to be found quite a number of terms which have one sense in one of the languages, and the very opposite in another. In the Arabic alone there are said to be 400 words having contradictory senses; and there was published in 1896[1] what claimed to be the first attempt at a systematic exhibition of such words in Hebrew. Dr. E. Landau, the author, includes our word *shaḥar* among them. He admits that the root indicates darkness, and quotes Rashi on Gen. xxxii. 21,

[1] *Die gegensinnigen Wörter im Alt- und Neuhebräischen.*

who says: "Till the going up of the dawn, i.e., till the withdrawal of the darkness of the night," although he adds: "and some say that the dawn is the semblance of light which is seen in the clouds before sunrise." He also notes the significant and prevailing locution of the dawn "going up." But he claims three passages in which the word has the sense of light. These are "His eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn" (Job xli. 10); "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun," etc. (Cant. vi. 10); "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning" (Isa. lviii. 8). It will be observed that the *kaph* of comparison comes into play in all these examples, and its pregnant significance has already been referred to.

It is not contended here that the Hebrew writers may not have thought of light when they used this word, for, in the nature of the case, they could not do otherwise. But it was, at best, an uncertain or imperfect light that was in their mind's eye,—the last of the darkness, rather than the beginning of the light; and the stereotyped significant term by which they denoted the appearance of the dawn would alone be sufficient to show how firmly this conception had fixed itself. Our word "dusk" would more accurately express the idea; and, since the word "dawn" has in our usage become restricted to the bright aspect, it would be well, in our interpretation of passages in which the word occurs, to bear in mind that, in any case, it is not the *brightness* of the morning that is referred to, but its *dimness*.

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